

of the same bipartisan support it received from the Education and Labor Committee just 2 months ago.

Before I conclude, I would like to thank a number of current and former members of my staff who have made this bill possible. First, to Kate Houston, who no longer works on Capitol Hill, let alone on our committee staff. Years ago, Kate helped craft legislation that closely tracks the bill we are poised to pass today.

Stephanie Milburn, who left our staff earlier this year to join Mr. BOEHNER's team, played an integral role in bringing this bill to where it is today, and I thank her as well.

Finally, I thank Susan Ross and James Bergeron for their work in helping to bring this bill across the finish line.

I have already mentioned thanks to Mr. MILLER, Mr. KILDEE, Mr. CASTLE, and I would like to thank their staff also for working with us so closely on this bill.

The team effort that we have demonstrated on this issue, and our ability to work closely with our Democratic counterparts, yielded the product we are poised to vote on this afternoon.

Mr. Chairman, I yield back the balance of my time.

Mr. GEORGE MILLER of California. Mr. Chairman, I yield myself such time as I may consume and just to thank my colleagues who joined in the general debate and for their support for this legislation and, again, to thank the staffs on both sides of the aisle of both the subcommittee and the full committee without whose work and effort and knowledge this legislation would not be in the kind of shape it is today, with the support that it has from both Republicans and Democrats for the Head Start bill.

Mr. McDERMOTT. Mr. Chairman, I represent a community that honors the memory and civil rights legacy of Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr. every day, because King County has adopted Dr. King's portrait as our symbol, and Dr. King's commitment to civil rights as our commitment to all the people in King County, Washington.

So, it is with a unique responsibility that I rise to strongly oppose this Republican attempt to turn back the clock on civil rights in this Nation, beginning with the Head Start program. The Minority Leader, the leader and spokesman for the Republican Party in the House, wants us to legislate employment discrimination within Head Start based on religion. The Minority Leader wants to turn his back on civil rights, and turn back the clock on the struggle for freedom that Dr. King and so many others fought and died for.

The Republican House leader apparently finds the First Amendment inconvenient for his taste. The First Amendment protects Americans from exactly the kind of foolish proposal before us today. Separation of Church and State is one of the fundamental principles within the First Amendment: "Congress shall make no law respecting an establishment of religion, or prohibiting the free exercise thereof . . ."

We must not roll back civil rights in this Nation, not today, not tomorrow, and not ever,

but that's what the I leader of the Republican party proposes. There is no reason to justify this attempt to roll back longstanding civil rights and religious liberty protections in a program that has benefited countless children over the years. In a nation like ours with so many religious traditions, built-in protections prohibiting religious discrimination in federally funded programs represents a fundamental commitment towards a society that values the contributions of people of all faiths.

Religious organizations have had a long and proud history in Head Start programs, including in my own district of Seattle, where the YWCA is a Head Start provider. Civil rights protections have never been a bar to participation by these organizations. If these safeguards are repealed, thousands of dedicated Head Start teachers and parent volunteers could find themselves no longer welcome at some Head Start programs run by followers of other faiths.

Religious organizations are free to engage in faith-based hiring when they use their own funds to promote their institutional ministry, but not when they use Federal money to educate our Nation's children. It would be wrong to permit religious organizations to use Federal dollars to discriminate on the basis of religion in running Head Start programs that are intended to benefit disadvantaged children of all faiths.

On behalf of the people of Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr., County, in Washington State, I strongly oppose this amendment and urge my colleagues to vote "No."

Mrs. CHRISTENSEN. Mr. Chairman, I rise in support of H.R. 1429, the Improving Head Start Act of 2007.

Mr. Chairman, for the last two Congresses we have successfully fought back the attempts by the then Republican leadership to cut funding, and to drastically change Head Start in ways that would prevent them from providing the services that our communities have come to depend on them for.

Every week I meet with outstanding high school and college students who began their educational journey in Head Start. This bill provides additional funding so that more children would have the opportunities provided by this important program.

H.R. 1429 also provides greater monitoring and accountability and increases funds for salaries and professional development.

As amended it also provides loan forgiveness for Head Start teachers as a means to attract and retain some of the best teachers for this very vulnerable group of children.

One thing this bill does not do is allow centers run by religious organizations to discriminate in their hiring.

Mr. Chairman, this bill, together with H.R. 1867 is an important step forward in realizing the "competitiveness agenda" that you have laid out for us in the 110th Congress.

I urge the passage of both bills.

Ms. SOLIS. Mr. Chairman, I rise in support of H.R. 1429, the Improving Head Start Act of 2007. Head Start is a program that has been crucial on the development and academic success of our children for more than 40 years.

Since 1965, more than 24 million children have benefited from Head Start's comprehensive services and school readiness. Last year alone Head Start served about 900,000 children nationwide—over 98,000 children in my home State of California and nearly 6,500 chil-

dren, more than 60 percent Latino, in the 32nd Congressional District of California, which I represent.

In addition to providing these comprehensive services, Head Start programs engage parents as partners in their children's education. Parents volunteer at their child's school site and many become Head Start teachers. Head Start has a proven track record of improving the lives of low-income children and families. It narrows the gap between disadvantaged children and all children in vocabulary and writing skills. It also leads to continued improvements in word knowledge, letter recognition, and math and writing skills relative to other children during their kindergarten year. 83 percent of Head Start children are at the national norm by the time they reach kindergarten.

Studies also demonstrate that Head Start programs improve the well-being of the children and families they serve, providing health and dental services to children and families who might otherwise not have them. Head Start programs benefit parents as well. Head Start parents report increases in education attainment and employment during their time affiliation with Head Start. In California, 24 percent of Head Start employees are or were Head Start parents. In addition, 86 percent of Head Start volunteers in California are current or former parents of the local Head Start program.

The Improving Head Start Act of 2007, H.R. 1429, not updates this program so all children could be put in the road for academic success. It makes significant improvements that will help strengthen educational outcomes for students, ensure better coordination with local school districts, improve teacher quality, and increase program eligibility. It would help improve Head Start's workforce quality by increasing funding for teacher and staff salaries and professional development. This includes providing funds for training personnel in addressing the unique needs of migrant and seasonal working families, families of children with disabilities, limited english proficient families and homeless families. It will also expand access to up to 10,000 more children and will strengthen school readiness by re-evaluating and updating current standards and assessments based on best science.

H.R. 1429 also reserves 5 percent of the total Head Start appropriation for the Migrant and Seasonal Head Start program. This is important because the Migrant and Seasonal Head Start program serves some of the country's neediest working families and is designed to meet the unique challenges and opportunities faced by the children of farmworkers.

At a time when America needs to be at the forefront of innovation and education, programs like Head Start are an investment in our future workforce and their success. I applaud the members of the Committee on Education and Labor for their work on the reauthorization of this important program. I urge my colleagues to vote in favor of H.R. 1429 and to oppose any proposal that would block this grant program or would allow government-funded religious discrimination in Head Start programs. Supporting this bill is supporting our Nation's future.

Mr. TERRY. Mr. Chairman, I rise in support of H.R. 1429, the Improving Head Start Act of 2007.

This bipartisan legislation will benefit nearly one million disadvantaged children nationwide